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1957 CONFERENCE ON NUTRITION EDUCATION

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The United States Department of Agriculture through its Nutrition Committee and the Interagency Committee on Nutrition Education and School Lunch held a Conference on Nutrition Education in Washington, D. C. April 1 to 3, 1957. Program activities were planned around the conference theme, Increasing the Effectiveness of Nutrition Education.

PARTICIPANTS

The planning committee decided that the conference should be limited to 200 participants in order to have work-study groups small enough to make it easy for all to participate freely in discussion.

Participants were selected from those who had already shown some interest in nutrition education, from those who expected to contribute to the conference or to use the information and ideas received at the meeting in their communities, and from those who reach fairly large groups of people. Each State nutrition committee was invited to assist by naming a member to represent their group. Areas of work as well as geographical distribution of participants were considered.

Eighty-six percent of the 200 persons who attended the conference were working participants. The rest were occasional guests who attended general sessions and did not participate in discussion groups. Areas of work represented by active participants were as follows: Social welfare and public health, 23 percent; education, 20 percent; extension, 18 percent; school lunch and dietetics, 16 percent; research, 9 percent; and information and industry, 14 percent.

Selected concepts about learners and learning from conference talks

Each learner is unique.

Each learner needs to feel considered and be actively involved in the learning operation.

Learning is more likely to be effective if there is progression from simple to more complex concepts.

Young children need to know—and are ready to learn—that food aids growth. Concepts that different foods do different things for us and that a variety of foods is needed follow later.

Teen-agers need help in understanding their growth and development and the relation of them to nutritional requirements. Nutrition education needs to help teen-agers develop philosophies and attitudes toward food which will serve them throughout life.

Programs based on premises which are true for one group may not be successful in a neighboring group with a different culture.

Any suggestions for modifying present food practices should involve only enough change to make them nutritionally good.

A variety of materials and resources effectively used expedites learning.

Self-appraisal is better than teacher-appraisal as teacher and pupil do not always have the same goal.

Premeeting preparation of participants

To start participants thinking early, a list of seven broad problem areas in line with the conference theme was sent out ahead of the meeting. Each prospective participant was asked to add to the list any ideas not covered of particular concern to her and then to rank problems in order of importance to her.

This is how participants ranked the seven original problems:

- 1. Helping people to better food practices.
- 2. Unifying the food and nutrition work of scientists, educators, and information people.
- 3. Determining "what" and "how much" nutrition information to provide.
- 4. Organizing for working together more effectively.
- 5. Suiting the approach to the family, group or individual.
- 6. Sifting sound from untrue and misleading nutrition information.
- 7. Developing flexible guides for nutritionally good eating.

The large response to the invitation to submit other problem areas was gratifying. The 135 additional concerns that were sent in were summarized under 10 broad topics which follow:

Assessing the nutrition situation including the dietary effect of our changing way of life—increased incomes, greater eating away from home, commercial preparation of ready-to-serve foods and meals, and other forces.

Evaluating effectiveness of nutrition education—its programs, materials (for teachers and general public), and teaching methods.

Developing attitudes toward food that will motivate children, youths, and adults to follow good nutrition practices throughout their life.

Using school lunch programs as learning situations to help children and youths improve food choices.

Selecting effective methods for working with different groups—children, youths, young adults, pregnant women, middle-aged and older adults, the overweight, the handicapped, homemakers and their families, and others.

Promoting and conducting nutrition-education courses in curriculums of institutions training elementary teachers and health and physical education teachers, and of schools training nurses, dentists, and physicians.

Providing refresher courses in nutrition for workers in related professions who need to be brought up to date and who need to keep their nutrition knowledge current—home conomists, teachers, nurses, dentists, physicians, social workers, school lunch workers, and others.

Developing school-community nutrition programs.

Working with information people representing press, radio, television, advertising, industry, and other special interest groups and using their services effectively.

Presenting food and nutrition information in a clear, simple, and direct way through visual aids and other teaching materials to laymen and workers in allied fields.

To provide a background of information on recent research on the nutrition and diets of individuals, an area which was not part of the conference program, each participant was sent a reprint of the symposium article, The Life Cycle and Its Diet, from the February 1957 issue of the Journal of Home Economics. Participants were urged to read the article before coming to the conference.

THE PROGRAM

The program was designed to be a combination of general assemblies and small work-group sessions.

First day

General sessions were held on the first day. In the morning Dr. Faith Clark of USDA's Institute of Home Economics gave the situation in respect to family diets today. Dr. Robert S. Fleming of New York University's College of Education followed with a discussion of what is known about principles of learning and how they apply to nutrition education.

The afternoon was devoted to a symposium on problems in nutrition education of different age groups. Dr. Miriam Lowenberg of Pennsylvania State University's Department of Foods and Nutrition covered pregnancy, infancy, and the preschool age. Dr. Willa Vaughn Tinsley of Texas Technological College's Department of Education spoke about the elementary-school age. Dr. Ercel S. Eppright of Iowa State College's Food and Nutrition Department dealt with adolescence. Miss Mary Egan of New York State's Department of Health discussed problems in teaching nutrition to adults.

Dr. John Cassel of the University of North Carolina's School of Public Health spoke on Society, Culture, and Nutrition Education at a dinner meeting the first evening.

Second day

The next day was completely given to working together in small groups. About 12 persons including a leader, two recorders (a local D. C. person and a State person), a hostess, and a summarizer of evaluation were assigned to each group.

The leaders, recorders, hostesses, and summarizers, constituting leadership teams, had come a day early to attend a general orientation session. Orientation included viewing a film, How To Conduct a Group Discussion (See Materials.) Principles of group discussion brought out in the film are summarized below:

 Comfortable physical conditions and good social feeling encourage a permissive atmosphere.

2. Leader needs a basic flexible plan that can be adapted to the situation.

- Direct interchange of ideas among members of the group is better than participation that is all leaderdirected.
- 4. Each nonparticipating member needs to be encouraged to participate.
- 5. Exchange of experiences by members enriches discussion.
- All members need to base discussion on facts and experience, not on opinions.
- 7. All members need to feel responsible for the effective conduct of the group.
- 8. All members need to understand the immediate and ultimate goals.
- 9. All members have a responsibility to try to improve the group's performance.
- Use of a variety of methods and procedures adds interest.

Each work-study group was free to discuss any problem or problems related to the conference theme—Increasing the Effectiveness of Nutrition Education. Each member had a copy of the list of problem areas stated above. This provided them with knowledge of the interests and problems of the total conference group and a ready list of suggestions from which they could select discussion topics, if they chose to do so.

An evaluation of the performance of each work-study group was made toward the end of the morning. On unsigned questionnaires, members rated their discussion group and told what they would like to see changed in the afternoon. Purpose of this evaluation was to improve discussions in the afternoon. Answers were summarized by each group's summarizer of evaluations who reported findings to the group after lunch.

Third day

The recorder for each work-study group prepared a report of its discussion. This was reviewed by all members in a short session held early on the third morning.

Following the group meeting, conference participants came together in plenary session. Through combined use of two familiar techniques, flannel board and dialogue, J. Neil Raudabaugh and Loretta Cowden of USDA's Federal Extension Service described the social-action process which takes place from the beginning of an idea to its adoption.

The same techniques were used by Mrs. Anne M. Lee, Indiana State Teachers College, and Dr. F. Eugenia Whitehead, State University of Iowa, in summarizing the reports of the discussions in the 12 work-study groups.

At the luncheon meeting which closed the conference, there was a report on the ratings participants had given the conference and their answers to five questions they had been asked. The questions concerned the strengths and weaknesses of the conference, participants'

own contributions to the conference, and their plans for sharing the conference with the people back home. Since there is to be a postmeeting evaluation on a questionnaire to be enclosed with conference proceedings, all evaluations will be reported in a later issue of N.C.N.

The luncheon meeting and the conference ended with voluntary reports from regional groups on their intentions to carry information and ideas back home. These reports were made possible by seating conference participants by their regions at luncheon tables.

SOME CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Selected important points made by speakers and participants in work-study groups during the conference have been collated and grouped under several problem areas. In the interest of brevity most statements have been abridged and are therefore not necessarily in the words of the contributor.

Helping people to better food practices

All learners. Each learner is unique as to background, needs, perceptions of the tasks to be accomplished, and readiness to undertake the tasks. Learning is facilitated and there is growth when feelings, anxieties, and problems of the learner are considered, when the learner feels "belongingness" and security, and when the learner is actively involved in clarifying goals, in planning, and in doing. (Fleming)

There are "golden" opportunities when people are likely to be more receptive to dietary change than at other times. Among these are—when people are in hospitals, when parents are having their first baby, and when a mother is breastfeeding her infant. (Lowenberg)

There may be "felt" needs of more importance to the individual or group than the "real" needs as seen by educator. (Discussion groups)

There are at least three steps to take before attempting to introduce any innovations into an area.

- 1. Gain an intimate, detailed knowledge of the people's beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and behavior.
- 2. Evaluate the psychological and social functions of their beliefs, attitudes, and practices.
- 3. Determine whether any distinct subcultures exist.

When trying to effect permanent changes in food habits in an area containing more than one culture, it is more efficient to concentrate on a carefully defined subcultural group and to use programs specifically designed for that group than to try to stage one program for the total area. (Cassel)

Change comes slowly. From the time an idea or problem is recognized until it is adopted and put into practice, there usually are several stages in the process (initiation, legitimation, organization and planning for action, and action program). Many different people, individuals and groups, are usually involved in nearly all stages. Studies of programs show that results are more successful if careful consideration has been given to each stage in the social-action process. (See Materials. Stages in the Social-Action Process.) (Cowden, Raudabaugh)

In helping people change their behavior it is important to treat the individual as a member of the family unit, if that is how he lives. (Fleming)

Extension workers often hold evening meetings so that entire families can come. One agent told how she strives to make them short and on a topic of interest to all. At the end there are always foods to sample.

To many groups, nutrition needs to be taught in terms of foods. Avoid making nutrients sound like medicines in a prescription.

Begin with present food practices. Suggest modifying them only as much as is necessary to make them good. The big problem is helping people to change to better food habits and not necessarily to convert food dislikes to likes. (Discussion groups)

Pregnant, lactating mothers. Informational materials often need to be supplemented by interview in order to help the pregnant mother see where her diet is deficient and how to change it to suit her own situation.

Psychological and nutritional advantages of breast feeding should be presented so that more mothers will be encouraged to breast feed their children, but those who are physically or emotionally unable or unwilling are not made to feel guilty. (Lowenberg)

Children. The number one strength in the problem of nutrition education of children is that they, like adults, like to eat. Also favorable to teaching good food practices are children's eagerness to experiment and watch for results and their zeal in trying to attain self-determined goals. They derive pleasure from making progress. Moreover, they are willing to "play the game," to participate in a group project, and to hold themselves to high standards.

Children get satisfaction out of pleasing teachers, peers, and parents. (Tinsley)

Teen-agers. Nutrition education should help teen-agers develop philosophies and attitudes toward food which will serve them throughout their life. A liking for a variety of foods should be developed along with this aim.

Tecn-agers are naturally endowed with inquiring minds, tremendous drives, and a great urge to make independent choices and decisions.

Teen-agers are concerned about their present looks, personality, vigor, ambitions, ability to work, growth, and development. Nutrition can affect these characteristics. However, because of their complexity, the contribution of nutrition to these characteristics must be carefully interpreted. (Eppright)

Teen-agers' desires to do good jobs of baby sitting and entertaining can be used to attract their attention to nutrition. (Discussion groups)

Homemakers. All homemakers are concerned about the food they serve. Club women want to know about low-calorie, high-status refreshments to serve in place of rich desserts. Preparation of fancy, "gourmet" food will appeal to other homemakers. Mothers with school children want to know about after-school and party snacks for children.

Homemakers employed outside the home have special interest in effective management of time, energy, and resources. (Discussion groups)

In the majority of American homes all major food decisions are made by the housewife, according to several investigators. Concentrating nutrition education on the housewife is therefore indicated for many subcultures in the United States. (Cassel)

Getting more for your food money can serve as a strong motive for learning about food values—especially when budgeting the family income is a problem.

Food that will keep you well and attractive has special appeal for most older folks. Some, however, will be attracted more by "adventures in eating." (Discussion groups)

Organizing for working together more effectively

From research to practice. Scientist and teacher need to combine forces to bridge the gap between technical nutrition knowledge and how to relate it to the needs and interest of individuals. (Eppright)

The pace and amount of research in life sciences, particularly in relation to developing and effectively promoting a healthy personality, need to be increased. (Lowenberg)

Preservice education. Physicians and nurses need adequate education in nutrition in order to be able to base their advice on findings from nutrition research. (Lowenberg)

Nutritionists in State public-health agencies in New York provide several kinds of consultation service to schools of medicine, dentistry, nursing, education, and home economics. They work with faculty members on the nutrition component of the curriculum, help find qualified personnel to teach nutrition, provide field experience and observation in community nutrition, and prepare and provide teaching materials. (Egan)

Lack of "know-how" on the part of teachers is not a lack of interest in nutrition but rather a lack of education in both sound knowledge and effective methods. Some training in nutrition and nutrition education could be incorporated into some of the semester hours now required in Health and Physical Education without adding hours to requirements for graduation. (Tinsley)

In-service education. Workshops, short courses, conferences, and summer courses could help teachers fill the gaps in their learning. (Tinsley)

If workshops for elementary school teachers more often carried college credit, they might draw more teachers.

Universities and colleges, State health departments and nutrition committees often unite to promote and give workshops. Lately many of these have been for workers in school lunch programs. The use of nutritionists and other personnel from several agencies in in-service training has been found to broaden the view of problems and make for better cooperation in solving problems.

Short courses for small homogeneous groups have been valuable in solving specific common nutrition problems.

Joint staff education of hospital, welfare, and health department personnel has proved helpful in facilitating exchange of information about patients' food habits, special diet prescriptions, home conditions, welfare allowances, and arrangements for providing followup on dietary problems.

Nutritionists have been providing consultations to nursing homes that do not have trained food personnel, conducting workshops for operators, participating in teaching days for staff, and assisting with the establishment of standards for food service. (Discussion groups)

Allying related interests. More nutrition committees need to consider including representatives from press, radio, television, advertising, and industry who spread nutrition information.

Wide representation on Nutrition Committees has educational value in that it provides opportunities for exchange of information and ideas on food and nutrition between nutritionists and members from social welfare, public health, education, research, industry, information, and retail establishments, and also from the family. Besides, people in the community are more

likely to become interested in nutrition programs if they are represented on the planning group. (Discussion groups)

Determining "what" and "how much" nutrition information to provide

Children. A child learns more effectively if concepts develop gradually from very simple to complex. The most important single bit of nutrition which a young child needs to acquire is that food aids growth. A child is ready to learn this. Concepts that different foods do different things for us, that a variety of foods is needed to "grow big," and that milk is practically indispensable are more complicated. Sound nutrition information in understandable terms should answer the child's developing needs for explanations as he requests it.

Directed observation of fast-growing animals and plants can convince a child that food aids growth. Animal experiments of a very elementary nature can demonstrate and convince even little children of the need to eat a variety of foods. Two young white rats—one on a diet of jelly sandwiches, snacks, bottled drinks, tea, and coffee while the litter mate is eating "some of everything" including milk—will show a difference in size in two weeks. It is important that every child sees the difference for himself and associates good growth with meals that include a variety of foods. (Tinsley)

In a school lunch project at Cape Girardeau, Mo., the learning theme changes as the child develops. In grades 1 to 3, children learn that "food is good," in grades 4 to 6 that "food makes a difference," and in grades 7 to 8 "why food is good." (Discussion groups)

Teen-agers. Children need help to understand their spurts in growth during adolescence and their development in other ways than height and weight, and that their nutritional needs are strongly influenced by the changes they are undergoing. (Eppright)

Homemakers. Homemakers often want and need more knowledge about what foods to serve and why, variety in food preparation, quick menus, food habits, special diets, and budgeting. (Discussion groups)

Sifting sound from untrue and misleading nutrition information

Children. Children need to become familiar with and use reliable sources of information as criteria in forming judgments. (Tinsley)

Professional workers. Among publications now available to help distinguish right from wrong statements on nutrition are Statements and Decisions of the Council on Foods and Nutrition of the American Medical Association and Facts about Foods and Nutrition, a Utah Extension Bulletin. (See Materials)

Bibliographies of sound nutrition materials have proven helpful to teachers (New Hampshire) and lay leaders (Minnesota). Ohio has prepared an annotated list of nutrition teaching aids. It tells the age level for which the material is intended. The material has been screened for misinformation. Much of it is free. (Discussion groups)

Assessing the nutrition situation

Some "how-to-do-its." Surveying the situation can be an effective means of obtaining community interest and support, especially if in collecting information the services of community leaders are enlisted to identify local food problems.

To determine where a community is in terms of readiness for a nutrition-education program, it has been found useful to—check on children's food habits; make a family food study; interview local merchants, ministers, and other leaders; observe what is offered in food markets and restaurants; and note what is served and left on plates in school lunchrooms. Several State Nutrition Committees, among them North Carolina and Utah, have promoted school surveys on opinions and attitudes about teen-agers' nutrition. Usually they are self-surveys with teen-agers doing the interviewing. (Discussion groups)

Family diets. Surveys show that family diets have improved considerably in nutritional adequacy in the past quarter century. But increases in food expenditures between 1948 and 1955 reflect a greater shift toward more expensive types of diets than toward consumption of nutritionally better family diets, according to a nationwide survey of household food consumption made in 1955. More restaurant meals also increased outlays for food. Larger use of foods rich in calcium, ascorbic acid, and other vitamins would have improved many diets in 1955.

In general, households in the North and West fared equally well, but households in the South were less well fed. Southern households used less milk and citrus fruit as well as other fruits and vegetables which accounts for the poorer showing of their diets in calcium and ascorbic acid. Diets of families in the Northeast, reflecting lower consumption of pork and grain products, were more often lower in recommended levels of thiamine than diets of families in other regions.

At relatively high levels of income, diets of some families were found in need of improvement in calcium, ascorbic acid, and thiamine. Therefore, it can be assumed that under even more favorable economic conditions than existed in 1955, greater use of good sources of these nutrients would probably still need to be emphasized in nutrition-education programs. (Clark)

Prenatal diets. Prematurity ranks high as a cause of infant deaths and is attributed to a combination of various nutritional, mental, or social factors which influence the general well-being of the mother. (Lowenberg)

Teen-age diets. Recent studies in Iowa and elsewhere indicate that teen-agers head the list of children who need dietary guidance.

According to studies of Iowa people, the proportion of children with diets fully meeting recommended allowances decreases sharply with age. As they grow older, girls reduce their food intake and with this, the nutritional quality of their diets, especially in calcium and iron. Boys fare better largely because they eat more.

Heavy tecn-age girls are infrequently found among those with excellent diets. In fact, they are more often found among the poorly fed group and on the average have diets no higher in calories than girls of medium weight. Few overweight girls are found among those with excellent diets, even those with diets high in calories.

Boys and girls choose breakfasts and snacks more poorly than they do noon and evening meals. With girls, as the caloric value of breakfasts decreases, the calories from snacks increase. (Eppright)

Adult diets. Adult diets are most likely to be short in calcium and ascorbic acid.

Among homemakers, the most knowledge about nutrition is found among those who are younger, better educated, and in higher income families. (Egan)

Evaluating effectiveness of nutrition education

Frequent appraisals of progress toward achieving a goal is a fundamental step in good methodology. Self-appraisal is better than teacher-appraisal. The parent or teacher does not necessarily have the same goal as the child. (Tinsley)

Satisfactions in nutrition are difficult to pinpoint, since many are intangible and only evident on a long-time basis. (Eppright)

Programs have been evaluated in a variety of ways—through written answers to questions on food practices

at meetings; accounts of food used by families or eaten by individuals; and observation of types and quantities of food canned and frozen, menus for church suppers and club refreshments, and children's selection of foods in the school lunch room. These become more meaningful if the present is compared with the past or if record is made before a program starts and again after it has been in operation long enough to take effect. (Discussion groups)

Developing school-community nutrition programs

The influence of school can be of great importance particularly if home and school are working cooperatively toward common goals. It is well to remember that the child gets more than twice as much of his food away from school, usually in the home, as he does at school. (Tinsley)

The school lunch program has tremendously advanced the introduction of nutrition into the curriculum of elementary schools. California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, and many other States are integrating nutrition into the total school curriculum or are working toward this end. The Hayward School in California has a slide film showing how they do it. (See materials)

Advance publication of school lunch menus in local newspapers and in flyers sent home has been considered effective in several States and communities. It serves many purposes—gains parental interest and support for the school lunch program, stimulates and helps homemakers plan better meals for the family, illustrates a good pattern for lunches, avoids duplication in home and school meals, and even keeps school lunch workers on their toes. One school lunch supervisor suggests supper menus to go with the lunches. Another has menus published in the Friday edition of the paper to help parents with next week's shopping.

Although, by and large, menu planning is the responsibility of school lunch managers, participation of others—PTA members; all children in the school; students in a science or other class; and student representatives—is encouraged in some schools on occasion and in others according to a plan for regular participation.

Various means have been used to introduce new foods into the school lunchroom. In one school, selected children sample the new food and tell the rest about it. In another school, the lunch manager and homeroom teachers have developed a "taster's treat." It is served in home rooms. Students give their reaction to the new food. If they do not recommend it for lunchroom use, they must tell why.

On occasion, in some schools, cook-managers attend faculty meetings to increase their understanding of the total problem of school feeding. (Discussion groups)

Presenting food and nutrition information

Use of mass media. In Connecticut different members contribute articles on topics related to their particular specialty for the Sunday paper. The approach is popular, the information accurate.

Chicago's members have given a series of three TV programs over an educational channel. They have had 5,000 requests for material offered on the programs.

Indiana has prepared a series of 10 half-hour TV shows and made kinescope prints for State-wide distribution. (Discussion groups)

Food guides. Whether or not the "variety of foods" is presented in groupings such as the Basic 7, the broader grouping of 4 as in the new bulletin, Essentials of an Adequate Diet, or some other arrangement is not really important in achieving the goal. (Tinsley)

A new plan is stimulating. The use of a variety of appropriate materials contributes to the effectiveness of learning. (Fleming)

Daily food guides can be made into attractive and colorful charts which families will be glad to hang in their kitchens. (Discussion groups)

MATERIALS

Listing of these materials is for the information of readers and does not necessarily mean recommendation. Materials may be obtained from the addresses given.

Symbols refer to-

GPO—Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C.

USDA—Office of Information, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C.

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Group work

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Teaching facilities

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A form is enclosed for ordering copies of the Proceedings of the 1957 Nutrition Education Conference described in this issue.

Requests will be filled as soon as the Proceedings are available.

Institute of Home Economics, Agricultural Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Interagency Committee on Nutrition Education and School Lunch. (The printing of this publication has been approved by the Bureau of the Budget, July 27, 1955.)